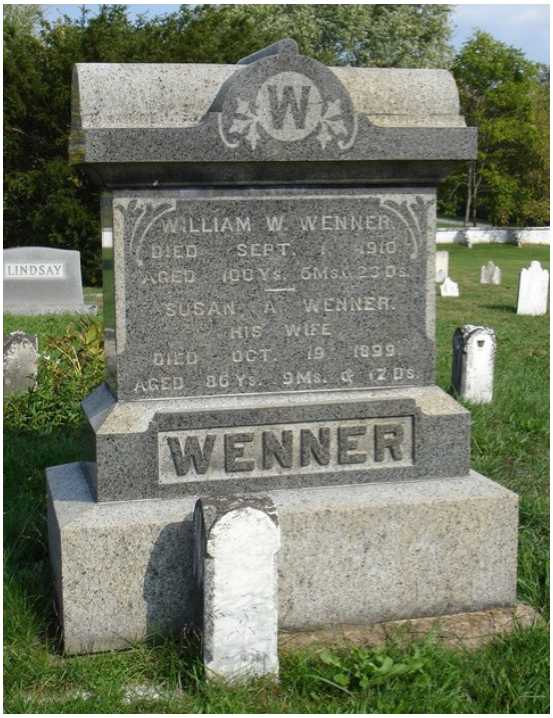
THE CITY OF BRUNSWICK
MARYLAND
1 West Potomac Street · Brunswick, Maryland 21716 · (301) 834-7500

Distinguished Citizen biography for:

William Waltman Wenner Sr.

1810-1910

Honored as a Distinguished Citizen in 2026



William Waltman Wenner Sr. never lived in Brunswick, yet few people did more to lay the groundwork for the city's future. A Loudoun County farmer, ferryman, and landowner known as "Uncle Billy," Wenner helped catalyze the expansion and development of Brunswick into a thriving B&O Railroad company town.

Wenner (whose full name is often abbreviated to "W.W. Wenner") was born in 1810 to John Wilhelm and Elizabeth Waltman Wenner and spent his life at Woodbine, the Federal-style family home his father built just north of Lovettsville, Virginia. He had family connections through his mother and wife to one of the region's most important river crossings: the Loudoun-Berlin Ferry, also known as Waltman's Ferry.

With his brother-in-law and business partner Joseph Waltman, Wenner controlled the ferry route across the Potomac from the 1830s to the 1850s, when farmers, merchants, travelers, and goods moved between Loudoun and Frederick Counties. Waltman's ferry connected Loudoun mills and farms with Berlin (Brunswick's predecessor), a place made increasingly important by the promise of commerce along the C&O Canal and the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad.

The Potomac River crossing placed the partners at the center of what would become Brunswick's early geography. Wenner remained in Lovettsville, but in 1835, Joseph Waltman purchased several tracts of land along the Berlin side of the Potomac extending toward Petersville. He continued to acquire land there throughout his life. For many years, Waltman lived in Berlin on the Potomac Farm, and his farmhouse later became the home of American Legion Post 96.

In 1855, W.W. Wenner received $3,150 (equivalent to $121,338 today) for his interest when the Loudoun and Berlin Bridge Company acquired the right-of-way for a covered bridge across the Potomac. The bridge opened in 1857 but was destroyed by the Confederate Army in 1861.

Wenner's greatest influence on Brunswick came through land, however. After Waltman, a wealthy bachelor, died in 1870, Wenner's family inherited much of his substantial holdings in and around Berlin. As the B&O Railroad invested in the area in 1889, W.W. Wenner's real estate became central to Brunswick's transformation.

Whether or not Wenner possessed advanced knowledge of the B&O's arrival and sat on the land is a matter of conjecture. The railroad made its decision about Berlin privately in 1880. Wenner's cousin, Charles Fenton Wenner, owned a mill at Lock 30 in Berlin and served in the Maryland House of Delegates from 1868 to 1870. With an office on Light Street in Baltimore, C.F. Wenner was a possible insider to the railroad company's plans and may have whispered in W.W.'s ear.

In 1891, the same year the B&O opened its great freight yard, the 81-year-old Wenner laid out "W.W. Wenner's First Addition", which covered much of Brunswick's west end. The First Addition was expanded westward in 1897 and labeled "W.W. Wenner's Second Addition." Wenner recorded a third plot called "Potomac Heights" in 1908. He sold land on present-day Brunswick Street for a one-room brick school. This was later replaced by the much larger West Brunswick Elementary School, formerly the site of the Brunswick Masonic Lodge.

Then, in 1906, Wenner completed his final transaction of lasting importance: the sale of 26 acres that the B&O needed for development of the eastbound railyard on the west end of town. The largest single company-owned railroad yard in the United States was by then well underway.

Wenner's family left its mark on both sides of the river. He married Susan A. Waltman in 1838, and together they raised a large family. Their daughters, Susan and Virginia, taught school in a small octagonal building at Woodbine. Their second son, William W. Wenner Jr., owned a farm just above Brunswick Street. His farmhouse was rolled down the hill on logs to what was known as Wenner Street (now 609 West Potomac Street) and connected behind the house he built in 1906. His wife, Ellen Brady Wenner, a native of Donegal, Ireland, was the town's first schoolteacher.

By the time W.W. Wenner Sr. reached his final years, Brunswick had changed dramatically. The old village of Berlin had become a thriving railroad hub. Wenner's decisions helped make that change possible. He connected Brunswick's past to its future: from ferry to bridge, from farmland to neighborhoods, from village to railroad town.

The Brunswick Herald reported in March 1910 that Wenner was "the oldest resident of Loudoun County" and still remembered national political events from the early nineteenth century. He remained active into old age before retiring as Loudoun County Judge of Elections in his 88th year. His third son, Americus Armstead Wenner succeeded him.

William Waltman Wenner Sr. died on September 1, 1910, at the age of 100.

The Mayor and Council and the Brunswick History Commission are proud to honor William Waltman Wenner Sr. as a Distinguished Citizen of Brunswick, Maryland.